

A Historical Study of the *Easy-to-Please* Construction -With Special Reference to Preposition Stranding-

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1. Introduction

1. 'easy-to-please' construction or 'tough' movement

- (1) a. John was easy to please.
b. To please John is easy.
c. It is easy to please John.

2. Movement vs. Base-generation of the subject in the matrix clause

- a. Movement - i. e.g. Rosenbaum(1967: 107)),
ii. 'tough' movement construction(Postal(1971: 27))
- b. Base-generation - i. e.g. Object Deletion(Lasnik & Fiengo(1974: 543-48),
Chomsky(1981: 308-10).
ii. Null Operator Movement and (the linking between the gap and the surface
subject by Predication) (Browing(1987), etc)
Evidence; the configuration of [V NP P t], the possibility of 'long'
movement, the licensing of a parasitic gap

- (2) a. The problem was tough to deal with.
b. He is hard to get a straight answer from.
- (3) a. John will be easy to convince Bill to do business with.
b. A book like that is tough to claim you've read carefully.
- (4) This book is difficult to understand without reading carefully.
Cf. $John_i$ was [_{AP} easy [_{CP} **OP**_i [_{IP} PRO_{arb} to convince t_i]]]

3. The arguments;

- a. The *easy-to-please* construction in Old English was the NP-Movement
construction like Passive, unlike the corresponding construction in ModE.

- i. Elaborate reconfirmation of Wurff(1987, 1990, 1992b) or Fischer *et al.*(2000: 256-83)
 - ii. Refutation of Fischer(1991, 1996a)
 - iii. Evidence 1: no preposition stranding possibility like (2a)
 - v. Evidence 2: no configuration like [... to V NP P] like (2b)
 - vi. The ending of the inflected infinitive in OE, i.e., *-enne* or *-anne* (combined into *-ne*) is like the passive morpheme *-en* in ModE, so it could absorb the accusative) case of the object, causing the movement of the object to the subject position for the Case reason.
- b. The change of the construction in Middle English was largely due to the loss of the (verbal) inflection. - the demise of the infinitival ending *-ne*

II. The easy-to-please Construction in OE

1. Wurff(1992a)

- a. low frequency of this construction (1/3) according to the data collection on the basis of Healey & Venezky(1980)
- b. all the adjective-infinitive examples - 286, the *easy-to-please* construction - 46

- (5) a. *ðis me is hefi to donne*
 =this for-me is *hard* to do
 'this is hard for me to do' (*Mart* 5(Ktzor) 2035[SE16/A/14])
- b. *ælc ehtnys bið earfoðe to polienne*
 =each persecution is *hard* to endure
 'every persecution is hard to endure' (*ÆCHom* II 42.313.110)
- c. *eaðe(lic)*'easy', *leoht*'easy', *earfoð(lic)*'difficult', *hefig(time)*'difficult',
uneað(e)'uneasy', *earmlic*'miserable,' *lang(sum)*

2. Characteristics

- a. The position for a gap is for the accusative object.
- b. *It*-subject construction and the null subject construction were also possible.

- (6) *hit is unieðe to gesecgenne hu monige gewin wæron*
 =*it* is *hard* to say how many fights were
 'it is not hard to say how many fights there were (*Or* 1 12.52.8)
- (7) *nis me earfoðe to geþoianne þeodnes willan*

=not is for-me *difficult* to endure the lord's will

'(it) is not difficult for me to endure the lord's will' (*Guthlac* A, B 1065)

3. No preposition stranding in the OE *easy-to-please* construction: Evidence 1 for the NP Movement analysis
 - a. Allen(1980b), Wurff(1990, 1992a, 1992b), Fischer *et al.*(2000: 267), etc
 - b. the first instance - roughly 14th c.
 - c. no preposition stranding in OE passives
 - d. P. H Lee(2001)
 - i. The richer the morphology of a language is, the less a preposition can be stranded.
 - ii. The function of a preposition is assumed to license the *morphological* case of its object, besides assigning the abstract case.
 - iii. In Old English, interrogative pronouns and demonstratives, which were also used as relatives, were always pied-piped by a preposition in preposing, because they had distinct morphological case which should be licensed by a governing preposition. Meanwhile, in a construction where no overt element is moved, the preposition is always stranded, because the case of the invisible object is not morphologically realized.
 - d. no 'long' movement; Evidence 2 for the NP Movement analysis

III. An infinitive clause consisting of words meaning 'pleasant', 'pretty', 'beautiful' etc.

- a. Preposition stranding was possible.

(8) Wæs seo wunung þær swyþe wynsum *on* to wicenne

=Was the dwelling-place there very pleasant *in* to live

'The dwelling-place there was very pleasant to live in' (*LS* 8(Eust) 315)

- b. no *it*-subject construction nor the null subject construction
- c. Null Operator movement

IV. The *easy-to-please* construction as the NP Movement structure

1. Wurff(1987, 1990, 1992a, 1992b), Fischer *et al.*(2000); no detailed account for the mechanism for the movement of the object to the surface subject position
2. Kegayama(1992)
 - a. *To* absorbs the external argument role of an infinitive verb.
 - b. *To* assigns dative Case to an infinitive as a sign of subject-verb agreement
 - c. *To* optionally absorbs accusative Case.
 - d. *To* functions as an anaphor., etc.
 - e. Criticism by Fischer(1996a)
3. The *be to* construction or modal passive construction
 - a. passive meaning, but no morphological passive

- (9) a. *pas þing sint to donne*
 =these things *are to do*
 'these things must/ought to be done' (*Lch* II(2)22.1.8.)
- b. *Eac is ðeos bisen to geðencenne*
 =Also is this example to think-of
 'Also this example can be thought of' (*Bo* 23.52.2)

- b. no preposition stranding in this construction in OE
- c. movement of the object of the infinitive

V. My arguments

1. a. OE infinitival ending *-ne* absorbs the external argument role of an infinitive verb.
 - b. OE infinitival ending *-ne* optionally absorbs accusative Case.
2. NP Movement structure

(10) [[**each persecution**]_i [_V is [_{AP} hard **t_i** to endure+enne]]]

- a. Assumption 1: The object can't be assigned Case in its base position.
- b. Assumption 2: The subject position of the matrix clause is a non-argument position.
- c. The analysis of the ModE passive construction by Baker *et al.*(1989)
 - i. The passive morpheme *-en* is an argument.

- ii. The argumental affix *-en* absorbs the thematic role of the subject and the Case of the object.

3. Only the accusative object of the infinitive can appear in the subject position of the matrix clause, as in the passive construction.

- a. accusative - structural case
- b. dative, genitive - inherent case

(11) a. ...swa swa *hit* awriten is

=as *it*(nom.) written is

'as it is written' (*ÆHom*.15.107)

b. þæt he ongann to writenne þa halgan *Christe boc*...

'that he began to write the book of holy gospel(acc.)...' (*ÆHom* 1.25)

(12) ac *him* næs getiðod ðære lytlan lisse

=but *him*(dat.) not-was granted *that small favour*(gen.)

'but he was not granted that small favour' (*ÆCHom* I 23.330.29)

4. The subject position of the matrix clause is a non-argument position.

- a. Hulk & Kemenade(1993) - A null subject can appear only in a non-argument position.
- b. My assumption - The infinitival ending absorbs the thematic role of the subject, making the position a non-argument position.

5. The category of the OE *to* infinitivals

- a. not CP - no complementizer for(Fischer(1988)).
 - no indirect infinitival question(e.g., Tell me *what to do.*),
 - no infinitival relative construction(e.g., the key *with which to open the door*)
- b. IP (TP or AgrP) - e.g. Kageyama(1992) proposes AgrP for OE *to* infinitivals, saying that *to* is inserted as AGR. - [ARRP *to* [VP V-*enne*]]
- c. Gelderen(1989, 1993) - *To* is a kind of the body of the (tense) features attached to the verb, saying that there were no functional heads at all in OE.
 - i. no split infinitive (e.g., It's wrong to *even* think that.)
 - ii. no pro-infinitives (e.g., I tried to read and John also tried *to.*)
 - iii. the position of the separable prefixes or the prepositional adverbs

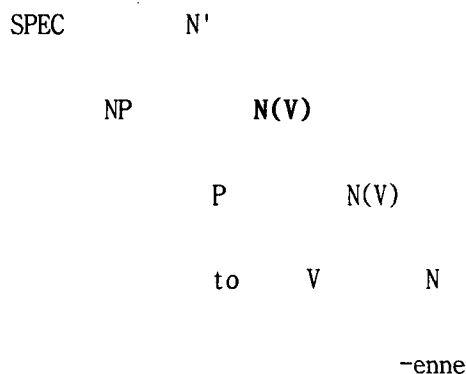
- (13) *deofolseocnessa ut to adrifanne*
 =demoniacal-possession *out to drive*
 'to drive out demoniacal possession (Mk (WSCp) 3,22: H&V)

iv. no separation between *to* and the infinitive

- d. *To* as a preposition, and the infinitive as a nominal element.
 i. traditional view - e.g. Lightfoot(1979, 1991), Fischer(1996a), etc
 ii. The more elaborate structure of the OE *to* infinitivals

The Germanic infinitive is historically a neuter noun built on a verb stem; by earliest Germanic it lost most of its nominal inflection, by earliest Germanic it had lost most of its nominal inflection, and consisted of a verbal stem+suffix: OE *ber-an*'to bear' < */ber-an-a-m/ (Cf. Skt. *bhar-an-a-m*'the bearing'). The *-an* suffix was inflectable for dative in Old English, giving *-enne* (later *-anne*); this occurred mainly after prepositions, e.g. *to ber-anne*. (Lass(1992: 145))

- (14) NP(PP)



iii. unclear points

- [V-*enne*] - N or V?
- The entire infinitival clause [to + [V-*enne*]] - NP(Lightfoot(1979)) or PP(Fischer(1996a))

- (15) *Ut eode to his gebede oððe to leornianne mid his geferum*
 'Out went *to his prayer* or *to study with his comrades*
 '(He) went out to give his prayer or to study with his comrades'
 (*Bede* 162, 7:C139)

- Which is the head of the infinitival clause, *to*(P) or *-enne*(N)?

iv. my assumption - The infinitival clause is an NP and its head is the ending *-enne*.

(16) This is a fouler theft than *for to breke a chirche*, (Lightfoot(1979: 187))

e. the categorical change from NP to VP, and then IP(TP or AGRP) with the introduction the infinitival complementizer *for* and the appearance of *wh*-element in the initial position of the clause

6. consequences of my analysis

- a. V-*enne* is one lexical element. - no split infinitive, no pro-infinitives, prediction for the position of the separable prefixes
- b. The head of the clause is N *-enne*, so the clause has the nominal character.

(17) a. [[**each persecution**]_i [_{VP} is [_{AP} hard [_{NP} **t_i** to endure+*enne*]]]]
 b. [[**Ðæs ðing**]_i [_{VP} sint [_{NP} to donne **t_i**]]]

- c. The morphological element responsible for the passive character of the construction was the infinitival ending *-enne*, absorbing the Case and external theta-role of the infinitival.
- d. no occurrence of the accusative infinitival construction(e.g., I expect *Bill to come*.) and the subject relation infinitival construction(e.g, a man *to fix the car*, many years *to come*)

7. The case-absorption is optional.

- a. *It*-subject construction or the null subject construction;

(18) nis me earfoðe to geþoianne *þeodnes willan*
 =not is for-me difficult to endure *the lord's will*
 '(it) is not difficult for me to endure the lord's will' (*Guthlac* A, B 1065)

- b. The *eager-to-please* construction: *geornfull`eager'*, *fus`eager'*,
 (un)*gearo'*(un)ready', *lustbære`desirous'*, *hræðe`quick'*, *mihtig`strong'*, etc;
 - no *It*-subject construction nor the null subject construction,
 the base-generated subject;

- (19) *þæt þu swiðe geornfull wære hit to gehyranne*
 =that you very eager were *it* to hear
 'that you were very eager to hear it' (Bo 22.51.6)

c. The 'pretty' construction - The trace (i.e., a variable) should have Case.

- (20) *his song & his leoð wæron swa wynsumu [OP_i [to gehyranne t_i]]*
 'his song and his poem were so *pleasant* to hear' (Bede 4.25.346.3)

VI. The changes after the ME period

1. The appearance of preposition stranding in the *easy-to-please* and *be to* constructions

a. around 1400 - Fischer *et al.*(2000: 272);

- (21) a. *þei fond hit good and esy to dele wiþ also*
 =they found it good and easy to *deal with* also
 'they found it good and also easy to deal with'
 (Cursor Mundi(Trinity & Laud MSS) 16557)
 b. *ye be nat to trust to*
 =you are not to *trust in*
 'you cannot be trusted' (Tale of Beryn(Northumberland MS) 343)

b. Preposition stranding in passives: after the 13th century

c. The possibility of the sequence [V NP P t_i] - reanalysis into the *wh*-movement structure;

- (22) *þe gospel ... is ... most esi to wynne heuene by*
 =the gospel ... is ... most easy to *gain heaven by*
 'the gospel is easiest to gain heaven by'
 (Wyclif Leaven Pharisees 2.22)
 Cf. *þe gospel_i ... is ... most esi [CP OP_i [IP PRO to wynne heuene by t_i]]*

2. The appearance of a morphologically passive infinitive;

- (23) a. þe blak of þe yge ... is ... hardest to *be helid*
 =the black of the eye ... is ... hardest to *be healed*
 'the black of the eye is hardest to cure'
 (Trevisa *De Proprietatibus Rerum* 42a/b)
- b. he till hiss Faderr wass Offredd forr uss o rode, All alls he wære an
 lamb to *ben offredd* (*Orm.*(Jun)12644)

3. Two questions to addressed

a. Question 1: Why was the morphological passive introduced into English at this particular period?

- i. Due to the disappearance of the infinitival ending *-enne* at this time, causing the NP movement of the object unnecessary.
- ii. The object position can be assigned Case in its base position by the infinitive verb.
- iii. Instead of the overt object, a null object moves to the clause-initial position to be interpreted by predication with the matrix subject.
- iv. The category of the *to* infinitive clause changed from NP into VP with the loss of its nominal head *-enne*.
- v. The introduction of the accusative infinitival construction and the subject relation infinitival construction

b. Why was the *easy-to-please* construction reanalyzed into the *wh*-movement structure, like the *be to* construction?

- i. no [... V NP P t] sequence in the *be to* construction
- ii. no SPEC of CP in the *be to* construction, which is the landing site for Null Operator

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